

Singapore 'fake news' law could hurt innovation: Google

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Technology giant Google said Thursday Singapore's new law against "fake news" could hurt innovation, a crucial element in the high-tech sector which the government is developing as an economic growth

driver.

Parliament late Wednesday passed legislation that gives government ministers powers to order [social media sites](#) such as Facebook and Twitter to put warnings next to posts authorities deem to be false—and in extreme cases have them taken down.

If an action is judged to be malicious and damaging to Singapore's interests, companies could be hit with fines of up to Sg\$1 million (\$735,000).

Individuals could face jail terms of up to 10 years.

Officials have said the law does not cover opinion, but will focus on fighting outright falsehoods carried on [social media](#) that can foment disorder in the ethnically diverse nation.

Ordering "corrections" to be placed alongside falsehoods will be the primary response by [government officials](#) rather than fines or jail terms, they said.

Tech firms, rights activists and journalists, however, said it could be used to curb freedom of speech.

"Misinformation is a challenging issue and we are working hard to address it," a Google spokesman said, a day after the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation bill was passed.

"We remain concerned that this law will hurt innovation and the growth of the digital information ecosystem.

"How the law is implemented matters, and we are committed to working with policy makers on this process."

Singapore has been expanding its high-tech sector and has convinced many of the world's top companies to establish their regional offices and key facilities on the tiny island.

Google, Twitter and Facebook already have their Asia Pacific headquarters in the city-state.

Last year, Facebook announced it will invest more than \$1.0 billion to build a data centre in Singapore, its first in Asia, which is expected to be operational around 2022.

Singapore is also host to several firms engaged in high-tech manufacturing and a nascent tech start-up scene.

Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch said Thursday the passage of the bill is a "hammer blow against the independence of many on-line news portals" and "will have a chilling effect on internet freedom throughout Southeast Asia".

Addressing parliament on Tuesday, law and home affairs minister K. Shanmugam said the law was necessary as the tech companies could not be relied upon to regulate themselves.

He also denied it was aimed at curtailing free speech.

"Free speech should not be affected by this bill. We are talking here about falsehoods... bots... trolls... fake accounts and so on," he said.

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